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ABSTRACT

An issue currently facing the African-American community is the incidence of divorce, which is presently at a higher rate than that of other groups. This study focused on the supportive networks of African-American couples utilizing a network analysis approach to examine the relationship between the networks, and marital satisfaction among the couples. Network analysis includes information about the size, density, frequency, intensity, and source of network support. The 1987 National Survey of Families and Households served as data source. For the purposes of this study, respondents who were African-American, married, and aged 19 and over were identified, thus yielding a total of 805 respondents. Focus was on role strain, social support, and marital satisfaction. Results of the analyses suggest that when a wide variety of members of the support network provide assistance and when spouses perceive themselves as giving and receiving high levels of household assistance, they tend to report higher levels of role strain. In addition, when respondents receive advice from a greater number of sources and when they receive help with household duties from fewer sources, they perceive their marriages as more rewarding. These results suggest that high levels of instrumental assistance from the social support network is associated with greater role strain and lower marital satisfaction, while high levels of emotional support are associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. (ABL)

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SOCIAL SUPPORT STRUCTURES AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN MARRIAGES

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Running Head: Support
Results of these analyses are preliminary

ABSTRACT

An issue currently facing the African-American community is the incidence of divorce, which is presently at a higher rate than that of other groups. It has been suggested that the high dissolution rates and sense of discontent among couples could be due to structural factors. These factors may combine to contribute to couples experiencing role strain, or the tendency to devote less attention to the marital relationship because of competing demands. However, it has been suggested that involvement with one's support network may function as a buffer, thus alleviating the effects of such stressors. In the current study, the relationship between these variables is examined. This investigation illuminates the influence of role strain and support on marital satisfaction. While some findings support current resaearch, other results highlight the need for further investigation.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing cultural diversity challenges existing institutions to provide research, policy and services that will effectively serve those who rely on these institutions. It has been asserted that the field of mental health has been inadequate both in researching cultural aspects of clinical issues (Tharp, 1991; Buhlan, 1985) and in serving cultural and ethnic populations (Dunston & Hall, 1987; Comer & Hill, 1985). Previous research has relied on a deficit model approach (Boykin & Toms, 1985), and has ignored the significant amount of intracultural variation (Wilson, 1984; Slaughter-Defoe, et al, 1990). The variety of structures and patterns of family life within the African-American community causes additional difficulty in attempting to investigate specific phenomenon.

The incidence of intact marriage within the African-American community is presently at a lower rate than among other groups (O'Hare, 1987; Taylor, Chatters, Tucker & Lewis, 1990). While overall divorce rates are increasing, the likelihood of marriage among African-Americans is decreasing (O'Hare, 1987; Taylor, Chatters, Tucker & Lewis, 1990). African-American marriage is, therefore, becoming a source of concern to social science researchers. It has been suggestsed that the highdissolution rates and the rising sense of discontent among couples may be due to structural factors such as unemployment and/or financial impoverishment (Semaj, 1982; Staples, 1986). Such factors may combine to contribute to couples experiencing role strain, or the tendency to devote less attention to the marital relationship because of competing demands. However, it has been suggested that involvement with one's social support

network may function as a buffer, thus alleviating the effects of such stressors (Kurdek, 1989).

Previous research which focused on the effects of the availability of a support network on individual and family adjustment have generally reported positive results. Greater kin tie support has been shown to result in decreased support seeking (Birkel & Repucci, 1983). Conversely, however, close-knit support networks have been found to exert greater control over members (Hirsch, 1979). Also, there has been evidence that an inverse relationship exists between network density and satisfaction with quality of support (Hirsch, 1979).

Because some African-American families tend to emphasize kinship teis, and extended family structures, features of network support may lead to different outcomes than those found in the support network literature. Previous studies have revealed that African-American families tend to maintain support networks composed of family members as well as friends (Chatters, Taylor & Neighbors, 1989, Wilson, 1990). Participation in activities involving the network has been shown to contribute positively to mental well-being (Ellison, 1990; Wilson & Tolson, 1990). there remains, howver, a need for a detailed examination of the effects of support network involvement on African-American marriages.

The present study focuses on the supportive networks of a African-American couples utilizing a network analysis approach. Network analysis includes information about the size, density, frequency, intensity and source of network support. Utilizing this ecological framework, this study examines the relationship

betwwwn support networks and marital satisfaction among African-American couples. It is hypothesized that couples with dense networks are less often asociated with other formal support systems, but tend to report greater satisfaction on various outcome measures because they do not perceive a need for support.

METHOD

The 1987 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; Bumpass & Sweet, 1988) is the data source. The total sample consists of approximately 17,000 households, residing in 100 "primary sampling" units nationwide. Of the 17.000 households contacted, 13,167 completed the interview-questionnaire survewy. The African-American sample was obtained by double sampling within these geographical units. For the purpose of this study, respondents who were African-American, married, and aged 19 and over were identified, thus yielding a total of 805 respondents.

The focus is on four NSFH topic areas selected from among the "self administered questionnaire" portion of the collected data. The areas are: 1. Role strain, as measured by number of hours devoted to household duties or attitude about work, parenting, and partnership activities, 2. Social Support, which includes density and reciprocity of the support network, 3. Marital satisfaction, as measured by respondent's or spouse's assessment of marital rewards and conflict escalation.

Role strain was determined through questions which rated the respondent's and spouse's number of hours devoted to various household tasks and through questions rating respondent's interest in and assessment of appreciation received for his/her paid employment, spouse, household maintenance, and parenting roles. Network analysis

variables were conceptualized as density, which measured the number of people available for a given task. Density was divided by specific tasks and included help with baby-sitting, transportation, repairs around the house, housework, and advice or encouragement.

Marital satisfaction was measured using questions pertaining to respondent's and spouse's assessment of marital quality, marital stability, fairness of the relationship, and conflict resolution. Analysis to be performed include factor analysis, canonical correlation analysis, and multiple regression.

Factor analysis revealed three factors for role strain with eigenvalues of 3.07, 1'.27, and 1.01. Factor i accounts for 34.1% of the variance, factor 2, 14.2% and factor 3, 11.2%. The three role strain factors account for a total of 59.6% of the variance.

Insert Table 1 about here

Factor analysis revealed two factors for marital satisfaction with eigenvalues of 4.55 and 2.11. Factor 1 accounts for 41.3% of the variance and factor 2 accounts for 19.2%. The two marital satisfaction factors account for a total of 60.5% of the variance.

Insert Table 2 about here

The sets of variables include the role strain and marital satisfaction factors, and social support network variables. Using canonical analysis, the relationships between the

density and reciiprocity of the social support network and role strain was examined. Multiiple regression analysis, then examined the relationships between marital satisfaction and social support network density.

RESULTS

The first analysis, testing the relationships between the density and reciprocity of the support network and role strain produced statistically significant overall results (Wilks Lambda, F = 4.89, p = .000), and 2 canonical variates with canonical correlations of .31 and .07. The first canonical variate accounted for approximately 10% of the variance, and is the only canonical variate to be interpreted.

Using .30 sstandardized coefficients as the cutoff for reporting, significant loadings in order of magnitude are reciprocity and density. Using the same cutoff, significant dependent variable loadings include spouse household maintenance (.468) and respondedt household maintenance (.818). These results suggest that couples with higher levels of reciprocity (.99) and greater support network density (.63) perceive themselves and their spouses as contributing large amounts toward household maintenance (ie., perceive higher levels of role strain).

Insert Figure 1 about here

The multiple regression analysis examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and social support network density. Of the variables included in network density (ie., baby-sitting, transportation, repairs, housework and advise-giving), advise-

giving (beta = .132, p = .013) and housework (beta = -.142, p = .029) were statistically significantly related to respondent's assessment of marital rewards. This suggests that respondents perceive their marriages as more rewarding when they receive advice from a greater number of sources and when they receive help with household tasks from fewer sources.

Insert table 3 about here

DISCUSSION

Results of these analyses suggest that when a eide variety of members of the support network provide assistance and when spouses perceive themselves as giving and receiving high levels of household assistance, they tend to report higher levels of role strain. In addition, when respondents receive advice from a greater number of sources and when they receive help with household duties from fewer sources, they perceive their marriages as being more rewarding. These results suggest that high levels of instrumental assistance from the support network is associated with greater role strain and lower marital satisfaction, while high levels of emotional support are associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction.

The finding that greater role strain is related to higher levels of support given and received suggests that couples with fewer resources are involved in dense networks, perhaps because they need to rely on their networks to function successfully. This is

consistent with the literature suggesting that support networks are an essential alternative for people less associated with formal support systems.

Surprisingly, emotional support is positively associated with marital satisfaction while instrumental support is negatively associated. Previous studies have found that dense networks tend to exert greater control over members. Results of the present study may indicate that greater network control manifests as increased marital tension. The difference between emotional and instrumental support in terms of marital satisfaction highlights the need for the use of complex measures to further dilineate important variables.

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TABLE 1

Rotated factor solution for role strain

	Factor Loadings		
	1	2	3
Eigenvalues	3.07	1.27	1.01
	Spouse	Respondent	Appraisal
Household Duties			
Cleaning house	.84	--	--
Washing, ironing, mending	.81	--	--
Washing dishes/cleaning up	.81	--	--
Preparing meals	.73	--	--
Paying bills & keeping records	.67	--	--
Washing dishes/cleaning up	--	.74	--
Shopping for groceries	--	.60	--
Describe things done as spouse			
Interesting/boring	--	--	.75
Appreciated/unappreciated	--	--	.56
Percent of variance	34.1%	14.2%	11.2%

Note: N = 352
Varimax rotation, orthogonal. Only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 included.

TABLE 2

Rotated factor solution for marital satisfaction

	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Eigenvalues	4.55	2.11
How might things be different	Marital	Conflict
if you separated	Rewards	Escalation
----------His/her overall happiness	.81	---
His/her sex life	.74	---
your overall happiness	.81	---
your social life	.73	---
your sex life	.70	---
his/her standard of living	.69	---
your standard of living	.69	---
During past year:		
Have arguments become physical	---	.82
How many times:		
Respondent hit spouse	---	.88
Spouse hit respondent	---	.89
Percent of variance	41.3%	19.2%

Note: N = 464
Varimax rotation, orthogonal. Only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 included.

TABLE 3

Multiple regression - Marital Satisfaction with Support

Satis1 (Marital rewards)

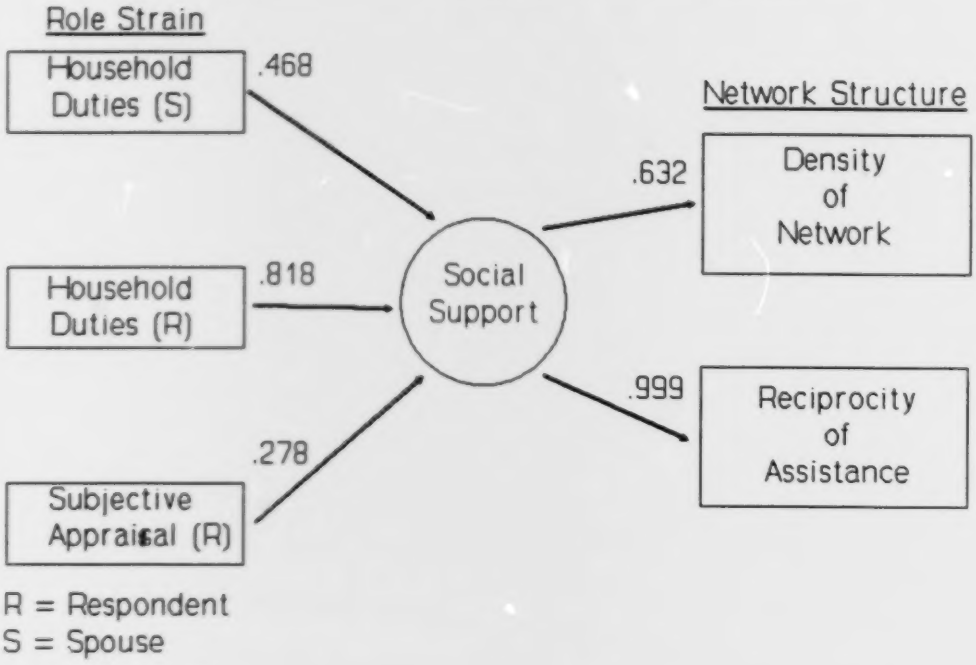
Covariate	Beta	t-value	Sig. of t
Babysitting	-.098	-1.171	.087
Transportation	-.015	-.228	.819
Repairs	.000	.006	.995
Housework	-.142	-2.190	.029
Advice-giving	.156	2.502	.013

Satis2 (Conflict Escalation)

Covariate	Beta	t-value	Sig. of t
Babysitting	-.064	-1.094	.275
Transportation	.063	.943	.346
Repairs	-.079	-1.211	.226
Housework	.034	.523	.601
Advice-giving	.006	.090	.928

FIGURE 1

Density and Reciprocity as related to Role Strain



$F = 4.89, p < .001$